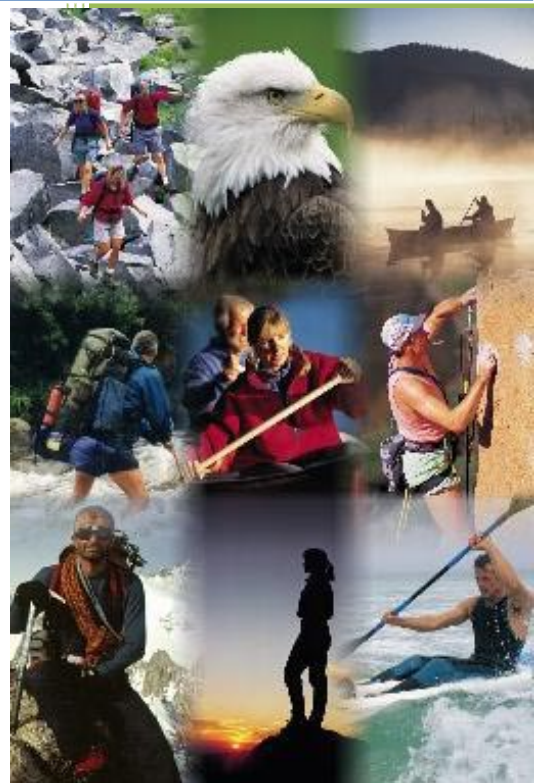


2008/9

Learner Handbook

Guidance Notes, Code of Practice & Policy Statements

For the Delivery of Training & Assessment for Nationally Recognised Qualifications



Adventure Qualifications Network cc

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AQN Learners' Handbook

1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose of this Document

This handbook is intended as a guide for people seeking high-quality, nationally-approved, adventure-related training, possibly towards certification, be it for recreational, or for commercial purposes. It contains a basic introduction to the Adventure Qualifications Network and provides information about the AQN's Training & Assessment Programme as well as outlining its Policies.

1.2 Brief background on the AQN

The AQN was established in July 2004 following on from 3 years of development by Wildways Adventures. This was in response to a need to ensure that the AQN would be able to address the assessment needs of the adventure industry as an independent body. The development was also in response to an emerging need for an accredited provider organisation to handle the administration of National Qualifications assessments for the Adventure Industry in South Africa.

National Qualifications were being developed and many assessors trained, but no provision was being made to assist an industry, which in general hates paperwork, to process the administration needs of the qualifications and to monitor quality. Also, policy that was being put in place did not understand or take note of the particular needs or circumstances of the Adventure industry, and as such, the industry was incapable of accessing National Qualifications in a way that met the particular needs of the industry and importantly met the industry standards already recognised both locally and internationally.

- The AQN therefore, is a dynamic industry needs driven organisation that responds to the needs of its Licensed Affiliate Assessors, to meet the demands of an increasingly complex National Qualifications system.
- The AQN itself does not undertake assessments, but only provides a means by which licensed independent Assessors can offer qualifications to learners.
- It provides for the needs of practitioners who must to hold formal qualifications in order to meet the various legal Acts of Parliament relative to guiding.
- The AQN provides an administrative service to Industry Associations, so that they can reduce the cost of administering their own training programs.
- The AQN designs and implements training and assessment programs both locally and internationally, that meet or exceed the industry requirements.
- With its broad knowledge base of training and assessment principles, the AQN advises other organisations on best practice, and assists organisations to set up their own training & assessment programs.

To ensure the AQN can consistently meet legislative requirements, member's requirements and its own needs, a comprehensive approach to quality assurance has been implemented.

The AQN does not enter into contract with individual Learners for training or assessment purposes - this must be done through the licensed Affiliates own companies. AQN can however provide free advice on qualifications and a referral service to licensed trainers or assessors.

1.3 Organisational structure of the AQN

The AQN comprises of its registered Members and accredited Affiliates, who are AQN-approved persons holding Trainer & or Assessor qualifications. It is the Affiliates who provide the training and assessment of the various levels of qualifications within the AQN Programme, in accordance with the standards, the procedures and the code of conduct defined by the Sector Education Training Authority. The Affiliates are contractually bound to the AQN and should be Learners' primary interface with the AQN for their training and/ or assessment needs and the related process.

1.4 Terminology

- **Trainer** – Qualified Instructor/ Trainer who has met the requirements of the National Qualifications Framework as a Trainer (Facilitator).
- **Assessor** – Qualified Assessor who has met the requirements of the National Qualifications framework as an Assessor.
- **Facilitator** – An AQN-licensed Trainer and/ or Assessor as described above, contracted to the AQN. Affiliates are the ones to contact to facilitate AQN training and/ or assessment.
- **Affiliate** – An AQN-licensed Trainer and/ or Assessor as described above, contracted to the AQN. Affiliates are the ones to contact to facilitate AQN training and/ or assessment.
- **Moderator** – Qualified Moderators who have met the requirements of National Qualifications Framework as a Moderator. This is a quality assurance function to help ensure high standards of assessment by assessors through reviewing the process followed, evidence collected and judgement arrived at.
- **We** – The term 'we' indicates the AQN organisation, including its Affiliates.
- **Learner** – A person who has registered with the Sector Education Training Authority and AQN for a training and/ or assessment course with an Affiliate. The term Learner refers, potentially, to YOU.
- **Qualification** – The training and assessment package for a specific level of NQF qualification.
- **Programme** – The full range of Qualifications that collectively make up AQN Training Programme.
- **Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)** – Recognition of Prior Learning is a means of assessing the currency and relevance of a Learners competency, based on the evaluation of a Portfolio of Evidence supplied by the Learner to an Assessor. This process is followed by Prospective Learners applying to skip out the training phase of a Qualification and is only for people who have a lot of relevant experience, including from the recent past (i.e. the experience must also be current)
- **Portfolio of Evidence (PoE)** - Body of Evidence showing Learners' current and relevant competence. This must include Learners' logbooks and may include: certified copies of relevant qualifications/ certification, testimonials/ letters of reference, product sample, and video footage.

1.5 Marketing

The AQN does, to a degree, market its Training Programme. To this extent, it has a website and advertises in industry magazines. Further to this, it is the Affiliates who market their training and assessment services.

Every effort is made to ensure that AQN products match the expected outcomes from our marketing strategies. Special attention is given to ensure that AQN advertising material accurately reflects the content and intended outcomes of our current Training Programme.

2. Educational Standards

2.1 AQN Training Programme Standards

The AQN's Training Programme is based on South African National Qualifications Framework & international standards (UK, New Zealand, Canada, etc.), with some modifications and additions to suit local conditions.

Adventure Qualifications Network is a registered provider organisation authorised by the Tourism Hospitality, Sport & Recreation Training Authority (THETA), for the delivery & assessment of nationally recognised qualifications. Our THETA Registration number is 613/P/000005/2004.

Standards are high, as are the responsibilities of all Learners. The training programme has been geared to the needs of adventure industry in South Africa, including the emerging commercial sector. The AQN has become, the industry-recognised organisation through which to get certified, for professional qualifications in this growing industry. The AQN Training Programme exceeds the outcomes required by the South African Qualifications Authority unit standards.

2.2 Affiliate Standards

Trainers & Assessors licensed by the AQN have a lot (normally a minimum of 10 years) of experience and a high level of competency, both as leaders and as trainers. They have been through (at least) one of the programmes and have gained formal NQF based qualifications as trainers or assessors. They also attend national workshops. At these they share and practice skills and experience, or new ideas, to help ensure uniformity of standards nationally and to maintain currency of instructor/ trainer competence. Trainers present AQN courses that fall within their 'scope of practice' as noted in their AQN license and they follow an AQN-prescribed standard of practice. Affiliates always try to provide the best possible service to and learning environment for their Learners.

2.3 Training and Assessment

Affiliates use competency-based training techniques. Training and assessment is concerned with the learning and demonstration of specified knowledge and skills, and their application, to meet each of the course learning outcomes. Learners' performance is measured against a pre-determined learning outcome rather than achievement relative to that of other Learners. With this training approach, the more simple knowledge and skills are generally covered early on, with the more complex ones coming later. There is confirmation of learning each step of the way. Confirmation of learning includes: theoretical tests, skill assessments and practical assignments where knowledge and skills will be applied. Affiliates will carefully consider individual needs at each step of the training process with the aim of maximising safety, enjoyment and skills/ knowledge transfer.

2.4 Quality Assurance

The AQN has a system of internal Quality Assurance in place to help monitor standards. This serves to further safe-guard Learners welfare and interests. The AQN Moderators, with the Learners participation, monitor the Affiliates performance and conduct, using a course evaluation questionnaire sent to each Learner after a course. In this questionnaire Learners are invited to comment on how well the components and delivery of the course matched their expectations, especially with regard to course content and the Affiliates consideration for their specific needs.

3. Registration

3.1 Pre-Registration

People considering registration with an Affiliate of the AQN for training and/ or assessment should, at an early stage, have a discussion with the Affiliate about their needs and the AQN's Programme, to establish what the most suitable level of training and/ or assessment is. So, if you have NOT received this Handbook from an AQN Affiliate and, therefore, have not yet made contact with a Trainer or Assessor, we recommend that you do this as soon as possible. This should be done, preferably in person (face to face), or at least by telephone, before going any further than reading briefly through this document.

The purpose of this initial discussion is for Trainers / Assessors to hear from Learners what their experience, needs and expectations are and then to orientate Learners as to the AQN's standards, policies, procedures and other important information. Affiliates will also ensure, at this interview / discussion, that Learners have all the relevant information on the Programme and the most appropriate qualification level(s), including content and vocational outcomes, fees and other costs. Affiliates should discuss flexible learning and assessment procedures, and options for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL).

By the time Learners register they should be fully aware of the Programme, Policies and Practice and should be happy to continue on with the qualification for which they are registering.

3.2 Required Experience

Training and Assessment courses generally require that Learners have certain levels of experience before starting the training, and/ or assessment. Learners are usually required, therefore, to provide the Trainer / Assessor with evidence of their relevant experience, to show they have met the specified requirements for the Qualification they plan to register for. This is done in the form of a logbook and/ or with references/ testimonials from past employer(s) and/ or well-known/ reputable leaders.

This logbook requirement is less important with entry-level Qualifications, but a mandatory requirement for the other Qualifications, especially in situations where applicant Learner(s) have never had formal training provided by a qualified trainer. The requirements for course attendance are detailed in the Info Sheets for each Qualification, available from AQN Affiliates, or off the AQN website.

3.3. Registration Process

In order to attend any of the training assessment courses, it is necessary for (potential) Learners to register with the AQN through their selected Affiliate. This involves Learners completing an official AQN Registration. This is done through any of the AQN Affiliates. This registration generally happens just before Learners start a training or assessment course. Please note: Direct applications to the AQN will not be accepted, as the AQN does not enter into contract with Learners.

Upon receipt of Registration Forms from Affiliates, the AQN registers the Learner onto the National Learner Database through the relevant Sector Education Training Authority and sends an acknowledgement of registration and registration numbers to the Affiliate involved.

Registration is required for each level of training and assessment done by a Learner. So, registration is for a Qualification and, when moving to another Qualification, re-registration is required.

3.4 Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and Current Competence

We recognise that some Learners may already have some of the required knowledge, skills and ability to apply these. If you are in this position, you are entitled to apply to your Assessor for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), with evidence being submitted to support your claim. Remember, if going this route, the evidence must indicate sufficient current competence for it to be most useful in supporting your application. If successful, Learners may be granted partial, or full, exemption from the training portions of a Qualification. However, the same Learners still need to undertake the full assessment to verify their current competency. There is no exemption from assessment.

3.5 Steps for RPL

3.5.1 Initial Application and Registration

Learners applying for RPL must register as such with their Assessor. To do this, the standard AQN Registration form must be completed and given to an Affiliate with an RPL fee determined by the Assessor. The registration fee is to cover the cost of guiding you through your RPL assessment and processing your application. Such Learners also need to submit their Portfolios of Evidence (PoE) that must include up-to-date logbooks containing their relevant experience. Documents explaining how to put together a PoE are available from your Assessor.

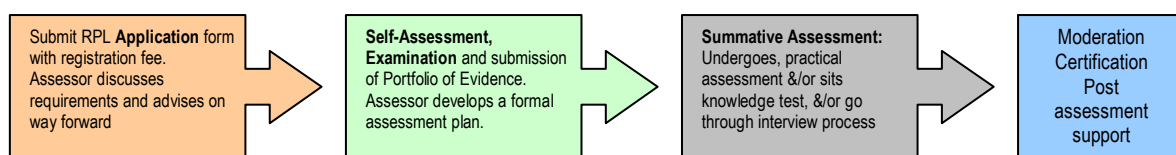
3.5.2 Portfolio of Evidence Assessment

On receipt of your application, your assessor will issue you with a list of assessment criteria for each of the unit standards you are seeking recognition for. You can then do a self assessment and decide whether or not you meet the criteria. You will also sit a written &/or oral examination at this time. After this period of self-assessment and provided you have attained 80% on the written / oral examination you should take reasonable steps to prepare yourself for the Summative (final) practical assessment.

RPL candidates have three months from receipt of assessment criteria to completion of the assessment. This is to prevent the assessment process from being backlogged with incomplete assessments, which delays the opportunities for other Learners.

Should you are found not yet competent during the RPL assessment, you will either need to re apply after gaining the required skills, or, book onto a course, or, request personal bridging coaching from your Trainer / Assessor to make up for the shortfall in your skills.

Modules that you decide NOT to RPL can be done by completion of appropriate workshops and summative assessment.



4. Courses

4.1 Information about Courses

4.1.1 Accessing Course Information

A certain amount of Course information is to be found in the Qualification Info Sheets for the various Qualifications. These can be obtained from Affiliates, the AQN, or the AQN website. However, some details concerning the courses need to be obtained from the selected Affiliates. These include: the scheduling (dates), the specific course programme, the location and venues to be used, the cost and what is included in that cost, payment arrangements, transport arrangements, equipment requirements etc.

4.1.2 Duration and Scheduling

The duration of courses is typically more than a day, up to 6 practical days, with additional time for lectures and/ or tasks for the Learners to complete as part of the training/ assessment. Courses are either presented in a

compact, 'block' period of time, or over weekends, spread out over a longer period to accommodate those people who can't free up from weekday work. The practical exercises are normally run over full days and held in suitable practical environments. Check with your Trainer on how the course will run.

4.1.3 Logistics for Courses

Learners must be prepared to do some travelling and to participate in an outdoor setting whilst participating in courses. Further, please note that food, personal equipment and transportation are usually NOT included in the course costs, unless otherwise stated by Trainers, or in the course information package given to Learners by them. Learners should speak to their Trainers about this, in advance of starting training and/ or assessment to clarify what they must provide for themselves. Should Learners require any specific equipment and/ or information that has not been made available, or some additional information for study or reading, they may request this through their Trainer.

4.2 Equipment

Equipment can mean the difference between life and death in the outdoors. Appropriate and reliable equipment can make the hardships and hazards of the environment, activity and associated weather more manageable and, therefore, make activities in the outdoors safer and more enjoyable. Group leadership is made significantly easier if the party concerned has the proper equipment, both group and personal, for the activity and the setting (location, activity, terrain, season and weather, etc).

Learners should, therefore, be in the ongoing process of upgrading their equipment. Old and/ or inferior quality garments, footwear and equipment can fail to function without warning and this could be at a time in the outdoors when it is very difficult to deal with the resulting situation and people's lives could be put at risk.

As mentioned above, Learners are normally expected to supply their own equipment and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) when attending training and/ or assessment courses. Part of the reason for this is that Learners become, whilst using it on courses, more familiar with their equipment and gain increased confidence in it.

This equipment includes such items as; mountaineering, diving, paddling & climbing equipment, etc. If Learners are experiencing difficulty in obtaining any equipment or are unsure of what to purchase in this regard, the Affiliates can be asked for advice, or can, possibly, arrange equipment loan/ hire.

There are many different brands on the market and each has its advantages and disadvantages. Any Affiliates equipment lost or damaged whilst under the care of Learners will be liable for its replacement at replacement prices. Second hand gear is not acceptable for replacement purposes should you lose loaned/hired equipment.

4.3 Venue

Training/assessment is designed to simulate as close as reasonably possible, the type of incidents that could occur in the context of the real workplace. Please discuss the needs with your Trainer / Assessor before making any arrangements if you will be using your own venue.

4.4 Travel

(Not applicable for courses conducted at the Facilitators hometown)

As a general rule organisations that book whole courses are to supply travel costs for the Affiliate where they have to travel to a particular clients venue.

As for distances of 400km or less, a hire car may be used by the Affiliate for travel to the site if road access is available. If road conditions require it, a 4WD vehicle will be hired. The cost of hire vehicle and fuel will be added to the total invoice amount.

For distances over 400km, Learner is to fly the Affiliate out to site if fly-in / fly-out arrangements are possible. Where practical, we need to fly in a day prior to course commencement, unless logistics prevent this. Flight bookings are to be arranged by discussion with your Trainer / Assessor.

For courses booked using another venue set by the trainer/assessor, Learners are responsible for getting themselves to and from the venue.

4.5 Accommodation & Meals

(Not applicable for courses conducted at the trainers/assessors' hometown)

As a general rule organisations that book whole courses are to supply accommodation and meals for the Affiliates on site or reasonably close to where the training/assessment is to take place. This is to be booked in advance and the Affiliate notified of address details etc. Standard three meals a day applies unless arranged with the Affiliate otherwise.

For courses booked using a venue set by the Affiliate, Learners are responsible for their own accommodation and meals unless specified otherwise in the course documentation.

4.6 Bad Weather

Bad weather is not always reason for postponing, or cancelling a training and/or assessment course. For some activities, light rain or patchy weather is considered, generally, to be acceptable conditions for courses to be allowed to continue. It should also be remembered that the most suitable conditions for training and/or assessing some outcomes include bad weather. This normally means having to be out in this weather with all the resulting discomfort.

However, set-in rain, very strong winds, extreme heat or other conditions deemed to be a safety risk by Affiliates, would necessitate the stopping, if already underway, and re-scheduling of courses. In other words, the Affiliates reserve the right to re-schedule a course, or portion thereof, at short notice due to adverse weather conditions. If this were to happen they would transfer Learners' bookings with no additional fees being charged for this. It should be noted that, in some cases, it is possible, in bad weather, to continue training and/or assessing at an indoor venue, if a suitable one is available.

If Learners are unsure, before the start up of a course, of the weather and have not heard from their Trainer / Assessor they should call them for a confirmation of the plan of action. Please understand that if you do not contact them, and the course goes ahead, you will not be entitled to a refund or transfer.

4.7 Risk Management and Indemnity

Please be aware that there are inherent risks involved in all outdoor activities and that, by participating in a training or assessment course, Learners are exposing themselves to these risks. Affiliates are well aware of this and exercise due care and diligence at all times. But, despite this, the risks still exist and can range from the possibility of sustaining an injury, to losing personal property (through theft, or absent-mindedness), to a Learner not enjoying a course or death.

Learners must realise that they may get injured in a wide range of situations, including: getting blisters from shoes or contact with plants, tripping, falling, being hit by a falling object, being stung or bitten, exposure to heat, exposure to cold, wet and windy conditions, dehydration, exhaustion, burns from sun, lightning, rope or flame. Some of these could have serious consequences, including resulting in disability, or death. So, Learners need to consider the implications of this before signing on for a training and/or assessment course. If you are unsure of the potential dangers, it is the Learners responsibility to ask for detailed information from their Trainer or Assessor prior to a course.

As referred to above, Affiliates will do everything in their power to reduce, or eliminate, the possibility of any of these things happening through professional conduct, risk assessment and management, high safety standards and through having the ability to deal with emergency situations. This does not, however, make them infallible.

As is the case in the outdoor adventure industry generally, all Learners are required to sign a disclaimer/ waiver & release/ indemnity form when making course bookings, or just before the start of courses. This form then becomes the Learner's agreement with the AQN and its Affiliates to accept that, in the unlikely event of an incident or accident involving the Learner, he/ she will take full responsibility for it and the consequences. Learners should read through the waiver release form with the Affiliates, who will if asked, explain the risks associated with participating in the specific activity and make sure they understand the content of the form fully before signing it.

Having said all of that, it must be said that statistically the most dangerous part of your involvement with training and/or assessment courses is the drive there and back! However, if the risk feels too big, then the outdoors are possibly not a suitable recreational play ground, or work environment, for you and you should re-evaluate your intended participation in these activities.

4.8 Learners' Responsibility to AQN

In order for Learners to qualify, at whatever level, they need to demonstrate competence in all the aspects of the relevant course. This usually involves the development of skills - practical, theoretical and interpersonal. Learners are required to work as part of a team and as team leader. Consequently, courses can be challenging in every respect, making Learners face issues, both inward and outward, which need to be overcome in order to progress. Learners' success, therefore, depends not only on their abilities but, as importantly, on their individual effort, stamina and attitude. Affiliates take every reasonable step to assist Learners, but (prospective) Learners must realise that they need to work, study and apply themselves to this task of getting an outdoor qualification. This programme is about YOU, the Learner.

Concerning Learners' behaviour on courses, it must be remembered that our conduct affects those around us. Said differently, the quality of the experience for the trainers and the other Learners during courses is affected, positively or negatively, by the conduct of the people involved. Therefore, Affiliates require Learners, whilst participating in training and/ or assessment courses, to present themselves in a responsible manner, both in dress and behaviour. This includes the sessions where different trainers and/ or leaders are in charge.

In other words, Learners need to conduct themselves in a manner that enhances the safety, enjoyment and well-being of all those involved in the course. If a Learner's behaviour is disruptive to other Learners or clients, or places others in danger, he/ she may be asked to leave the course, without the option of a refund.

4.9 Attendance at Courses:

Your Trainer or Assessor expects you to attend all programs that are booked for. In most instances, failure to attend a part of a course may prevent attendance for the rest of that course. Ordinarily, you will be able to negotiate a variation to your program or recommence at the relevant module on the next scheduled course.

However:

- If your retention of learning outcomes previously completed is not adequate, you may be required to complete all previous modules again at your cost.
- Where you have not met the conditions of refund, failure to attend may culminate in loss of fees for the rest of the course.

You will not be entitled to transfer if you fail to notify your Trainer / Assessor. Persons who don't attend a program or program module due to extenuating circumstances, may be given a transfer, at the discretion of the Affiliate, but you must notify them. Even if it is close to starting time, call them and let them know where you are.

5. Certification

5.1 'Registration' for Assessment

Affiliates schedule the assessment at a suitable time after training and inform Learners of the cost of this and all relevant details about the assessment, such as place, time, process etc.

Learners need to apply to be accepted onto an assessment course. For application Learners must submit their up-to-date logbooks and, ideally, other relevant evidence to Assessors. They need to show that they have met the specified minimum requirements for the consolidation period. Assessors accept Learners if they have met the requirements and show evidence of being ready for assessment. If not, then they advise applicants what they need to do to better prepare for the assessments, before they would be accepted onto the relevant assessment courses. This is partly an effort by Assessors to uphold the prescribed high standards, but also to prevent Learners wasting their time and money if they are not yet fully competent.

5.2 Summative Assessment

Due to the high practical content of Adventure Based Qualifications, much of the assessment for these is practical. Questioning, normally both written and verbal, to assess knowledge also forms part of the assessment course. Further, simulation may be used to assess Learners' ability to apply their knowledge and skills to a variety of different contexts. The duration of assessment courses varies, depending on the level of Qualification, and this information is given to the learner by the Assessor for each Qualification level.

All assessments require the full participation and preparation of Learners. Learners are expected to prepare themselves for assessment as well as can be reasonably expected, having read and studied all supplied course material and having practiced the practical skills until he/she feels confident. Assessors take every reasonable step to ensure that Learners are ready for assessment. If you are experiencing difficulties, you may approach the Assessor for counselling and advice.

Practical assessment is not just a 'tick' exercise. It is a relaxed and friendly learning experience in itself. We find that most Learners have some difficulty in performing tasks to the required standard, or are lacking in some aspects of knowledge. Our Assessors are more than willing to discuss concepts and methods with you before the assessment, to help you perform all the required tasks satisfactorily.

Your Assessor will generally, during practical tasks, set a required task for you and let you complete it to the best of your ability without interruption. Should you manage to complete the task in a way that "Works" & is "Safe" you will be deemed competent in that task. However the Assessor may then discuss or show you other ways to do the task which they feel are better or more efficient. This does not mean you are wrong. It is just a way to enhance your assessment experience and improve your skills in a way you may not have thought of.

Assessors compile reports, including judgements, for each Learner following assessments and they send these together with supporting information to the AQN for moderation & processing.

Assessment results can be: Competent or Not Yet Competent. The procedure for Learners to follow, in the event of not being competent, will be explained by the Assessor.

Occasionally however, Learners fail their summative assessment, but this is usually the result of poor preparation for the assessment by the Learner. Assessment fees are not refundable, but the knowledge gained in the case of an unsuccessful assessment usually outweighs the cost.

5.3 Certificates

On completion of assessment, Learners' completed documentation will be submitted to the AQN for moderation and the issue of certificates, when applicable. Certification is dependant on Learners having demonstrated to an assessor competency in all aspects of the qualification.

Please be aware that although assessors give Learners results after assessments are completed, an AQN moderator may change the results as part of the assessment moderation process, if deemed to be necessary. In such cases Learners would be informed of all the factors that have led to the change in result.

AQN Certificates for successful Learners are sent directly to Learners in order to allow quick registration with the Department of Environmental Affairs & Tourism (DEAT) if this is necessary in terms of the Tourism Act, and the National Qualifications once received from the relevant Sector Education Training Authority (SETA) are sent to Assessors for checking and who then arrange for Learners to receive them.

The AQN undertakes to complete all administrative functions within seven (14) days of finalisation of all components of any assessment & receipt of the completed files from Affiliates. Successful Learners should receive AQN Certificates within twenty one (21) days after the completion of their assessments. National Qualifications Certificates regularly take longer to arrive depending on the workload at the SETA. Should Learners experience a delay in receiving certification they are asked to please contact the AQN, who will follow up and report back to them.

5.4 Validity Period

National Qualifications do not expire. However it must be remembered that without regular participation your skill level will deteriorate which could place you and other participants in danger. AQN recommends that learners register with "Industry" Associations for regular re assessment or verification of their competence at the appropriate levels. This is to help ensure that certificate holders remain appropriately active and, therefore, maintain their knowledge, skills and ability to apply these. AQN recommends that Industry Associations apply a system of issuing a "Licence to Practice" with regular re assessments.

6. Specifically for Learners

6.1 Putting in the Effort

Learners need to be passionate about the activities and what they do in these, as well as have the desire to lead and take responsibility for the safety and well being of others in outdoor terrain, if they are to get the most out of the Training Programme and be good leaders.

To be a good leader it takes a high level of the relevant knowledge, skills and practice, together with commitment, strength of character and good social skills. These characteristics include: discipline and reliability, decision-making and delegation skills, patience and perseverance, perception and attention to detail, empathy and compassion, stamina and resilience, humility and grace, sense of humour, self-critical.

Learners are expected to apply themselves and co-operate with the course trainer/assessor. During courses important safety information is given which must be complied with for the safety of all course participants and future group members. The course is performance-based which means that Learners must demonstrate that they are capable of performing the required skills to the level expected.

6.2 Access and Equity

Learners have the right to learn in an environment that is free from discrimination and harassment and be treated in a fair and considerate manner, regardless of culture, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability or age. Affiliates are committed, in their association with the AQN, to integrating access and equity principles into their services and to providing information, advice and support that are consistent with these principles.

So, the AQN does not intend to place obstacles in the path of prospective Learners who have special needs and aspirations to learn. However, there are certain realities that go with undertaking physical activities in remote

environments that people with disabilities may find difficult, or impossible, to deal with. The performance requirements for a course are never waived, regardless of a person's physical and/ or mental ability. Therefore, there are some conditions that apply.

If an Affiliate is found to have violated basic human rights, or act in a way that is inconsistent with these conditions and the accepted code of practice, the person or organisation will be dealt with, through the AQN policies and in accordance with the legislation in force at the time of the non-compliance.

Note: There are age restrictions for people wanting to participate in Courses. This varies depending on the level of the Qualification concerned. These age restrictions for courses are specified in the Qualification Info Sheets.

6.3. Medical

Participation in the activities associated with training and/ or assessment requires a reasonable level of fitness. Learners should not, therefore, have any medical condition that may interfere with their ability to undertake the planned activities. If there were to be any doubt about the medical fitness of a Learner, medical approval from his/ her doctor would be required by the Affiliate before the individual is allowed to participate in the course.

The AQN Affiliates require from (potential) Learners a doctor's letter of approval for course participation if they have any of the following medical conditions:

- Severe epilepsy
- History of back and/ or spinal injuries.
- History of kidney/ renal problems
- Severe asthma
- History of heart attacks and/or heart problems.
- Disease that would be classified by a medical practitioner as highly infectious (notifiable), posing a real health threat to others.
- Any other medical condition that could interfere with the ability of a person to participate safely in the planned activities.

NOTE: Allergies, especially any that could lead to severe allergic reactions, must be brought to the attention of Trainers / Assessors before the start of a course. Learners who are susceptible to allergic reactions should carry medication around with them as a precaution. If such Learners do not have suitable medication they must inform Trainers or Assessors in advance, so that alternative arrangements can be made.

Medical Aid and Rescue insurance details must be given to the Trainer or Assessor prior to commencement of a course, as well as any specific medical related instructions, such as "Do Not Resuscitate" or other "Living Will" instructions.

Where no specific instructions have been provided by the Learner, Affiliates will endeavour to provide the best possible medical care to Learners who are injured, and where a learner is unconscious, the Affiliates will be deemed to have the authority to make all appropriate decisions regarding the care of the learner until such time as is otherwise proven, or a family member is contacted.

6.4 Physical Fitness

Most training and assessment courses offered by Affiliates are in some way physically demanding. It is important, therefore, that Learners disclose any physical condition or illness that may limit or endanger them, or their fellow Learners whilst with them. Any information given to Affiliates will be kept in the strictest confidence. If the condition is of a highly personal nature, a word with the Trainer or Assessor in private will do. If you do not tell your Trainer / Assessor, it is presumed that you are in good health and are adequately fit for the planned activity.

It should be remembered that outdoor leaders are required to be "fit for task", achieving and maintaining a higher level of fitness than that required merely for participatory purposes.

If Learners are in doubt as to their ability to complete training due to low fitness levels, they are asked to discuss this with the relevant Affiliate when making bookings to attend training and/ or assessment courses. They should also get confirmation from them, as well as any other leader/ trainers who may be brought in by the Affiliate to assist on the course, that they are aware of the condition.

6.5 Swimming ability

For some Qualifications river crossings and/ or river travel is part of the qualification. This means Learners would be required to enter the water and possibly either swim, or paddle, across according to the nature of the situation. Learners who are non-swimmers must bring this to the attention of the Trainer or Assessor before the start of any such activity. Further, any medical condition that may interfere with a Learner's ability to swim, or

participate in planned water activities, must be brought to the attention of the Affiliate before the start of these activities.

6.6 Insurances

Neither the AQN nor its Affiliates will be held liable for any medical, or rescue, expenses arising from an incident and/ or accident that may occur during training and/ or assessment courses. Therefore, Learners are strongly encouraged by the AQN to ensure they have suitable life and medical insurance cover, as well as emergency evacuation cover, before the start of courses, to cover these unlikely, but possible, eventualities. Learners should make sure that these insurances are valid for and cover fully the activities that they are to be participating in. Check the fine print of the Exclusions section!

7. Trainers / Assessors Specific Requirements

Your Trainer or Assessor will more than likely have specific additional requirements and arrangements for your training or assessment courses. Please ask them to provide these in writing to you to avoid any misunderstanding of their requirements.



(See overleaf for AQN Policy Statements and Conditions)

A. AQN POLICY STATEMENTS AND CONDITIONS

Learners should make themselves aware of the policies of the AQN. These are the focus of this part of the Learners' Handbook. Some have been summarised, while others are included in full. Where the full policy is shown below it is indicated by the words "Full Policy". Additional information and full policies can be obtained from your Trainer or Assessor or the AQN.

A1. Quality Assurance

The AQN strives to ensure that all Learners receive adequate training. Training should be realistic and accurate, equipping Learners with skills and knowledge that they need for properly managing the demands of the activity environment. This is relative to the type and level of training they are undertaking. AQN Affiliates have extensive experience in safety and in the training of outdoor-based activities. Ideally, the course is not properly completed until every Learner has reached at least the required (minimum) standard of performance. We do not "cut corners" and we never compromise safety.

All Learners who have just completed a course will be invited by the AQN to complete a short questionnaire to get feedback about their impression of the quality of the trainer or assessor and the course content. Feedback from the questionnaire is used to improve our Programme of Qualifications and associated services. The AQN treats all information supplied by Learners in this questionnaire as confidential.

A2. Access and Equity - Conditions

Due to the demands of outdoor activities and potentially rough nature of the terrain, as well as the possibility of remote settings, the performance requirements for a course are never waived, regardless of a person's physical and/ or mental ability. Therefore, the following conditions apply:

- **Paraplegics/Quadriplegics:** Adventure based activities and other work activities in exposed situations, or in remote locations require a person to have the full use of his/her limbs. Such mobility is, therefore, a crucial performance requirement in most courses. An example as to why this is the case is, in the event of an accident in the outdoors, a person who is not fully mobile may find it difficult, or impossible, to carry out an improvised rescue, or to go to call for help.
- **Amputees:** Provided the person is otherwise fit and healthy, he/ she can undertake Adventure activities.
- **HIV and AIDS:** The AQN and its Affiliates do not discriminate against people who have tested HIV positive, or who have AIDS. However, Learners who have HIV and/ or AIDS must inform their Affiliates of this fact before the commencement of the course they intend to participate in, as it is possible that blood or other body fluids could be transferred between participants in an accident. This brings the matter to the relevant trainer and/ or assessor's attention and serves as a safety precaution. The information is confidential and would be treated as such by trainers/ assessors involved with the course.
- **Pregnancy:** The 1st trimester of pregnancy does not normally interfere with sporting activities (exception: scuba diving). However, we require that pregnant women, who are planning on attending a training and/ or assessment course, first contact their doctors for advice and to obtain written approval for inclusion on the course. This doctor's letter should then be submitted with the registration form to the chosen Affiliate. Pregnant women past the 1st trimester of pregnancy should think twice about participating in a course at that stage and must definitely obtain medical approval from their doctors. It should be noted that, in most activities, the impact force of a fall could harm both the mother and her unborn child.
- **Socio-economic:** People from previously disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds who cannot afford the cost of training as a once-off payment may request a progress-payment arrangement from their Trainer or Assessor, where course fees can be paid off in a series of instalments. The instalment amount is negotiable with Affiliates. Either way, the same standard of learning opportunities and fairness prevail in the training Programme for all Learners, regardless of their social status and/ or economic background.
- **Religion, race and creed:** Prospective Learners, or Learners already enrolled on a course, will not be denied access to a course, abused, or in any way singled out on account of their religious beliefs, creed, race, physical appearance, or political views. However it must be accepted by Learners that some sections of courses may take place over days of religious significance, or recognised "days of rest". Acceptance of this, when necessary, is necessary to help the Affiliates meet the logistical requirements.
- **Mental capacity:** A person must have the mental capacity to understand and appreciate both the potential dangers and the technical skill requirements of working in the Adventure industry. AQN performance requirements are not waived, or modified, to suit the mental capacity of an individual. Learners are required, after training and suitable consolidation, to effectively solve problems and apply recently acquired skills to meet performance objectives under assessment conditions and then on an ongoing basis.
- **Vision impairment:** All course vocational outcomes require a person to be able to make a detailed inspection of technical systems and the environment. Failure to carry out proper checking by observation and tactile test could result in catastrophic accidents. We feel that glasses and/ or contact lenses should be used/ worn during training and assessment course, as well as on an ongoing basis whenever involved with activities, by Learners whose vision requires this.

- **Language:** Typically training is presented in English. However interpreters can be arranged by Affiliates, or the Learner(s) needing that extra service, with any costs relating to this being for the account of the Learners needing this additional service. Affiliates may run courses in other languages at their discretion.

Any infringement of the above Access and Equity conditions by the Affiliate, will be dealt with through the AQN, in accordance with the legislation in force at the time of the non-compliance.

A3. Language, Literacy and Numeracy Policy (Full policy)

Training and assessment often takes place in potentially dangerous and, or remote locations and settings, realistic in terms of the environment Learners are to be practicing in after courses, on an ongoing basis. Therefore, Learners' ability to quickly and correctly give spoken instructions, or to immediately understand and appropriately respond to them, is crucial to individual and group safety.

The following Language, Literacy and Numeracy requirements apply to courses:

1. All courses are taught in the English language unless otherwise stipulated by the Affiliate.
2. Learners must be able to understand and speak the course language with its technical terminology.
3. Learners are expected to understand questions that others may ask and to respond in a way that is reasonably clear and of sufficient content to properly address the question asked. The vocational outcomes require Learners to be effective communicators.
4. Learners must be able to quickly and accurately respond to instructions, some of which may be given in stressful and potentially dangerous situations.
5. The ability to read and write is not obligatory. However, Learners are expected to complete a series of written exam papers using the course language. Those Learners who cannot read may, therefore, request to have the questions read to them by the assessor, who may also, if asked to by Learners who cannot write, fill in the exact answers given verbally by such Learners.
6. Learners are expected to be able to perform simple calculations using whole numbers. A calculator may be used where fractions, or decimals, are involved. Higher education Learners are expected to be able to use simple equations to find solutions to mathematical problems, as such calculations are necessary for some qualifications.

A4. Refund Policy (Full Policy)

AQN fees paid by Affiliates for administration services will not be refunded.

Fees paid by Learners to Affiliates will not be refunded when Learners leave a course before it starts, or part way through, due to "lack of interest" or "change of mind", and, when a Learner is asked to leave due to any act that falls within the disciplinary policy.

Learner registrations are deemed to be confirmed, once processed by the AQN and will not be refunded.

A5. Sexual Harassment and Discrimination Policy (Full Policy)

The AQN undertakes to comply with sexual harassment and anti-discrimination laws as enacted by Parliament and embodied in our Constitution. It is the AQN's policy that Affiliates avoid making unreasonable adjustments to a course if it will cause unjustifiable hardship. If a Learner, or other course participant, feels that they are being unreasonably harassed or discriminated against, the matter should be reported to the AQN as a matter of urgency. The matter will be dealt with following the standard AQN appeals procedure.

A6. Privacy Policy (Full Policy)

The AQN does not disclose to a third party any information about AQN office staff, Affiliates, or Learners, that it holds, including contact details. Should Affiliates, or Learner information be required by a third party, prior written consent of the parties involved would be needed, before the AQN considered making any such disclosures.

This policy does not apply, however, to information that the AQN must disclose for quality assurance, moderation or certification purposes. Details on what this information is and who gets to see it is available on request.

A7. Access to Personal Records (Full Policy)

Learners have the right to access to their personal records. Access must be requested in writing to the AQN, who would make the necessary arrangements. When accessing personal information, Learners may be asked to provide proof of identification, where the office staff does not personally know them.

A8. Learner Disciplinary Policy (Full Policy)

To ensure all Learners receive equal opportunities to gain maximum benefit from their time the following rule applies to all people who attend any courses, either as participants (Learners), or as observers. Any person who displays dysfunctional or disruptive behaviour may be asked to leave the course / assessment.

Dysfunctional/ disruptive behaviour may include, but is not limited to:

- Continuous interruptions to the trainer or assessor
- Smoking in non-smoking areas
- Being disrespectful to other participants
- Harassment by using offensive, or abusive, language
- Sexual harassment of any sort
- Acting in an unsafe manner that places the individual, or others, at risk
- Acting in a manner detrimental to the equipment or the environment
- Refusing to participate in group activities when required to
- Absence at required times without prior notice, or making the necessary arrangements.

Any Learner who is asked to leave a course / assessment has the right to appeal through the AQN appeals process.

A9. Re-Assessment Policy (Full Policy)

If Learners do not meet the assessment requirements for any qualification they may apply to be re-assessed or to re-do the assessment at a later date. This re-assessment may or may not carry an additional assessment fee, and this should be discussed with the Assessor.

Learners who are unable to gain competency after re-assessment despite their best efforts, may apply, within 14 days, to meet with their assessor to discuss how best to proceed with training and/ or assessment. In such situations, assessors would determine, with reference to the relevant records of training and/ or assessment, the best course of action in each case. Sometimes, remedial training may be recommended prior to re-assessment.

If a Learner is unhappy with the outcome of this process he/ she may make a formal appeal, as per the AQN appeals process.

A10. Complaints, Grievances and Appeals

The AQN respects the right of all Learners to complaint, or to appeal, or to lodge any other grievance that may arise due to such persons association with the AQN and/ or its Affiliates. All such submissions must be reported within our quality assurance system, to the AQN at address - P.O. Box 2510, Hillcrest 3650, or info@aqn.org.za Further, submissions should be in writing and should include a request for confirmation of receipt, to ensure recognition of each case. A complaint/appeals form is available from the AQN or your Trainer / Assessor.

10.1 Appeals Policy:

The Affiliates typically possesses knowledge and skills at a level far above that of the Learners. Learners should, therefore, respect the advice and experience of the Affiliate and, ideally, avoid entering into dispute that diverts valuable time away from the task at hand.

However, if a Learner has a genuine grievance, he/she should explain to the Affiliate what the problem is, so a solution can be found and applied. In such cases, this should be all done in a considerate manner that causes the least possible disturbance to the flow of the course.

Regarding grievances that involve safety, Learners should note that certain procedures, in some modules of training, could appear, to an inexperienced person, to be dangerous. However, it must be said that the Affiliates are acutely aware of the risks involved and take utmost care to ensure that these are conducted safely, with all due care. Any complaint based on safety issues should, therefore, be carefully considered and weighed up before grievance action is formally lodged with the AQN.

If disputes arise, the Affiliates try to resolve them by working towards a mutually agreeable solution. It is AQN policy to ensure that our Learners are completely satisfied with the professionalism, course content and relevancy of the training and assessment.

If a solution cannot be found at the time, the Learner should implement the following Appeals Procedure:

10.2 Appeals Procedure

Stage 1

Within seven (7) days, the Learner must communicate the appeal to the AQN in writing.

Stage 2

After informing its-self of the situation, the AQN will ask the appellant to formally present his/her case (in private if requested) to a panel appointed by the AQN. A timetable for hearing the matter will be mutually agreed upon. If a face-to-face meeting is not possible, a telephone discussion or other electronic means may be used. Minutes of this process will be maintained.

Stage 3

After hearing full details of the grievance and considering evidence from both sides, the appellant will be notified in writing of the outcome within five (5) working days. The reason for the decision and corrective action stipulated will be disclosed.

Should there be sufficient evidence of wrongdoing on the part of an Affiliate, the AQN shall implement its Disciplinary procedure to fully investigate the matter further and make recommendations.

A11. Recognition of Qualifications (Mutual recognition policy)

The AQN and its Affiliates are obligated to recognise qualifications and statements of attainment where another similar organisation has validly issued them. However, the AQN recognises that, due to the wide variance in the context and environment in which an individual's training and assessment took place, a particular qualification may not automatically grant equivalent rights, or other guarantees of capability to perform certain skills. Further, although a qualification issued by another organisation may be valid, the recipient of that qualification may not necessarily still be proficient many years after qualifying. This is made worse when the person concerned has not maintained his/ her skills through regular practice, or refresher training.

So, the AQN and its Affiliates must consider issues such as 'currency' and 'context' (the ability to perform under specific conditions). The AQN and its Affiliates assert their right, therefore, to assess any individual applying for a conversion of any other similar qualification to AQN Certification, regardless of what qualifications are held, before assigning an AQN certification.

This approach must be seen in the context where, when working in the outdoors, or performing outdoor adventure-related skills, a single error could have catastrophic results.

A12. Moderation

A minimum of 10% of all assessments undertaken by each Assessor will be moderated. Learners must understand that this process may change the results they initially receive from their assessors, but that it does not affect Learners' right to appeal against any such changes. Should you receive a course quality assurance questionnaire after your assessment, you must complete it and return it to the AQN as certification will not occur until this has happened.

WAIVER RELEASE AGREEMENT

All learners are deemed to by their registration for a course or assessment have agreed to the following:

I understand that I may be required to participate in outdoor activities such as mountain walking, rock climbing, abseiling, horse riding, paddling, scuba diving, guiding &/or other adventure based activities dependant on the training / assessment I am requesting and furthermore acknowledge that there are certain risks involved in such activities which may result in injury or even death. With this knowledge, to the extent permitted by law, it is my intention by this instrument to exempt and release AQN, its management and personnel and all related entities from liability or responsibility whatsoever for personal injury, property loss or damage or wrongful death however caused, including but not limited to the negligence of the released parties, whether passive or active.

I understand that in the unlikely event of my requiring medical attention and I am unable to give verbal consent, that I authorise the programme providers to arrange suitable treatment for which I accept responsibility of any costs incurred.

I understand that during my training/assessment, I may be required to attend "on-the-job" training under the supervision of other instructors and leaders. I understand that my conduct during such sessions will affect the quality of the experience for those clients who are attending the activity either favourably or adversely. I therefore agree to behave in a professional manner both in dress and bearing. Furthermore I understand that my conduct during this training includes a responsibility to the clients for their safety and well-being. I hereby acknowledge my responsibility in this manner and agree to accept responsibility for my actions in this regard.

I understand that there are inherent risks involved in outdoor activities and in partaking in these activities I am exposing myself to these risks voluntarily. Some of the risks may involve personal injury, loss of my personal property through theft or absent-mindedness or even the possibility that I will not enjoy the program.

I have considered the implications of tripping over and spraining an ankle, sustaining bruising or grazes, or being hit by falling debris like rocks, sustaining friction burns from ropes, getting overly cold or hot, being wet for long periods, trapped in rivers or in extreme circumstances, sustaining major injuries to my whole body in general. There is even the possibility of being bitten by reptiles or mammals, stung by bees or wasps, or being sick from being bitten by mosquitoes or other insects or animals! I may get, sunburnt, dehydrated, exhausted, traumatically injured or frozen. Any of these could land me in intensive care or worse, dead.

I understand that my trainers or assessors will do everything in their power to reduce or eliminate the possibility of any of these things happening through professional conduct, risk management, high safety standards and having the ability to deal with emergency situations, but that does not make them infallible.

This then becomes my agreement to accept the possibility of personal risk to myself as being my responsibility.

This is included here to serve as part of your contract with your Trainer / Assessor but is not necessarily the same as forms that Affiliates may use for their courses. However, the basic underlying conditions would apply to any additional forms indemnifying Affiliates from liability during courses.

Learners are required by Affiliates to complete and to sign (and have co-signed by witnesses) such forms before they can participate in the courses.

Note: This handbook has been written up to accommodate a very wide range of circumstances some of which may not apply to you. If you are not sure how a section applies to you, or wish to negotiate some alternative arrangement with your Affiliate, we encourage you to do so in good time.

Please Note: You have contracted an Affiliate of the AQN to undertake training and/ or assessment but are in no way contracted to the AQN itself. The AQN only has financial and contractual dealings with Affiliates. The AQN is only an administrative, quality setting, monitoring and assurance body.

Therefore please address all queries with regards your training and/ or assessment course to the Affiliate you are dealing with. However, suggestions, comments or appeals concerning the AQN Programme may be addressed directly to the AQN itself.

Your Affiliates association with the AQN is as a licensed Trainer and/ or Assessor, authorised to use the Training and/ or Assessment programmes the AQN has accreditation for. Affiliates who advertise that they offer AQN courses are legally responsible to the AQN and its quality assurance systems.

Please visit the AQN website on www.aqn.org.za to confirm that the Trainer / Assessor you have contracted is a valid licensed affiliate with AQN, prior to payment of any monies to them, or contact the AQN directly for confirmation.



Appeals Form

In the event of you wishing to appeal against anything regarding your training program or your assessment, please fill in this form giving as much detail as possible. Any supporting evidence including documents etc, must be attached to this form.

Once you have completed this form, please send it directly to AQN at P.O.Box 2510, Hillcrest, 3650.

Learners Name: _____ Date of Appeal: _____

Course: _____

Trainer & or Assessor: _____

Explain how you were assessed?	
List the reasons why you disagree with the assessment decisions.	
Which one of the following options could resolve the matter?	<input type="checkbox"/> Another Assessor/Trainer <input type="checkbox"/> Different Assessment/Training Instrument <input type="checkbox"/> Different Assessment/Training Method <input type="checkbox"/> Different Venue for Assessment/Training <input type="checkbox"/> Different Time
List any special needs you might have.	

Signature of Learner: _____

Received at AQN: _____ By: _____

Decisions: _____

